Christopher Columbus returned from his first voyage on March 4, 1493, landing first at the mouth of the Tagus River close to Lisbon, Portugal. He informed the Portuguese authorities of his arrival and met with King John II before continuing on to the Spanish port of Palos, arriving on March 15. He probably reached the Aragonese court in Barcelona by mid-April.\(^1\) While still in Portugal or perhaps while on his way to the Spanish court, Columbus dispatched two letters written in Spanish describing the experiences and findings of his first voyage. One was addressed to his supporter and benefactor Luis de Santángel, Escribano de Racion at the Court of Aragon, and the other to the Spanish monarchs, Isabella and Ferdinand. The letter was soon published (between late March and mid-April, most likely in Barcelona), and a Latin version (purportedly translated on April 29) was printed in Rome.\(^2\) While Pope Alexander VI, a Spaniard himself, would have had no issues reading the Spanish version, it is likely that it was the Latin translation that was brought to his attention.

While clearly informed by Columbus’s letter and whatever additional information the Spanish monarchs may have provided, Inter Caetera must first and foremost be seen and understood in the context of a series of papal bulls that reacted to the development of Portuguese and Spanish ‘discoveries,’ first along and off the western coast of Africa but later also with regard to the trans-Atlantic route to ‘India.’ The bull Inter Caetera was not even the first with this name. In 1456, Calixtus III, an uncle of the later pope Alexander VI, had issued a bull the main text of which, after the introductory protocol, began with these words (and a bull is usually named after these opening words). Going beyond the geographical scope of its predecessors Dum Diversas (1452) and Romanus Pontifex (1454), both issued by Pope Nicholas V, the 1456 Inter Caetera bull granted Portugal the right of conquest “as far as the Indies” (usque ad Indos) - that is, Asia –,” as William Henry Scott reminds us, “and threatened any challengers with excommunication. Similarly, after the Treaty of Alcobas ended Spain’s unsuccessful attempt to do so, Sixto IV’s Aeterni Regis of 1481 granted what had already been decided by naval artillery – Portuguese occupation of Atlantic islands like the Azores, Madeiras and Cape Verdes – and sanctioned all future such discoveries ‘in the Ocean Seas’ (in mari oceano), the waters believed to surround the Eurasian land mass. The question of eastern and western sea routes had not yet become an issue. European cosmographers, unaware of the existence of the American continents, did not doubt that the same waters washed the eastern shores of Asia and the west coast of Europe.

Thus when Ferdinand V sent Columbus into those waters to reach the Indies, he was breaking the oath he had sworn at Alcobas and defying papal excommunication.”

Alexander VI’s *Inter Caetera* bull, the name of which was hardly chosen by accident, addressed and amended, therefore, an established framework of papal grants in a changed geopolitical reality, as Spain seemed to have discovered the western route to Asia. Its first version was ostensibly written on May 3, but it had in fact entered the Vatican registry (Regestae Vaticanae) by the end of April 1493. In order to avoid a violation of the stipulations of *Aeterni Regis* and the Treaty of Alcobas, which could have led to an open confrontation with Portugal, the pope granted the Spanish monarchs ‘only’ those lands that at the time of their discovery were not ruled by a Christian prince and made it very clear that “no right conferred on any Christian prince is hereby to be understood as withdrawn or to be withdrawn.” This could hardly have been satisfactory to the crowns of Castile and Aragon, who, informed already about the results of Columbus’s first voyage, feared the Portuguese would enter a ‘discovery’ race in the west for which, in 1493, they were far better positioned than Castile and Aragon.

Alexander’s second version of *Inter Caetera*, dated only one day later (May 4) but written probably months after the first version, reproduces in large part the same text as the May 3 version but with one (twice mentioned) addition: The May 4 bull establishes a demarcation line for the spheres of the Spanish and Portuguese interests from the North to the South Pole “one hundred leagues to the west and south of any of the islands that are usually called the Azores and Cape Verde.”

The Latin text was established using the digitized original as well as Davenport’s edition. Mostly in concordance with Davenport but in contrast to the edition of Levy Maria Jordão, it reproduces the original’s 15th-century Latin spelling as well as its capitalizations and only rarely disagrees with Davenport’s readings, as in its retention of the text’s *negocio* in contrast to Davenport’s hypercorrect *negotio*. However, while Davenport for the sake of greater readability dissolved all abbreviations, for this edition, the abbreviations are expanded by including the omitted letters in square brackets. We are aware that this might slightly decrease the readability of the edited Latin text but hope that it will increase and encourage the use of the original document, which in Davenport’s day was reproducible only as a black and white facsimile, in contrast to today’s high resolution digital surrogates. To further encourage the use of this edition alongside the (digitized) original, we also indicated line breaks with a slash where they occur in the document, which will hopefully help readers navigate the text in the original bull.

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6 “*Bulla del Papa Alejandro VI dada el año 1493, en que concede a los Reyes Cathólicos y sus sucesores todo lo que ganaren y conquistaren en las Indias no estando ocupado por otros*”. 1493-05-04, Roma; MP-BULAS_BREVES.4, Archivo General de Indias, Sevilla, Spain, [http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/17163?nm](http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/description/17163?nm).
7 Davenport, *European Treaties*, 72-75.
Translation differences between this new translation and Davenport’s occur more often in tone than in content. Of the latter, the most important is probably this: When discussing the religious aims of these expeditions and conquests, the pope states that it is a priority for him that those barbarian peoples _ad fidem ipsam reducantur_, which Davenport translates as being “brought to the faith itself.” However, since the semantics of the verb _reducere_ carry an element of ‘back/return’ due to its prefix ‘re-’, we decided to translate the clause as “bringing them back to the faith”, the implications of which Sebastian Modrow is exploring in a separate piece of scholarship. With slight variations, this papal request to return the local populations to the true faith occurs multiple times throughout the bull.

ALEXANDER EP[ISCOPU]S
SERVUS SERVO[RUM] DEI
Carissimo in [Chris]to filio Fernando Regi et
Carissimae in [Chris]to filie Elisabeth Regine
Castelle, Legionis, Aragonum, Sicilie et
Granate, illustribus, / Sal[u][t]em et
ap[o]st[o]licam ben[edictionem].

Inter cetera divine Maiestati beneplacita opera
et cordis n[ost]ri desiderabilia, illud profecto
potissimum existit, ut fides catholica et
chr[ist]iana r[e]ligio n[ost]ris presertim
temporibus exaltetur ac ubilibet amplietur et
dilatetur animar[um]q[ue] salus procuretur
ac barbare nationes / deprimantur et ad fidem
ipsam reducantur.

Unde cum ad hanc sacram Petri Sedem,
divina favente clementia, meritis licet
imparibus, evocati fuerimus, cognoscentes
vos, tanqua[m] veros catholicos Reges et
Principes, quales semper fuisse novimus, et a
vobis preclare gesta toti pene iam orbi / notissimae demonstrant, nedum id exoptare,
se omni conatu, studio, et diligentia, nullis
laboribus, nullis impensis, nullisque parendo
periculis, etiam proprium sanguinem
effundendo, efficere, ac omne animum
v[est]r[um]q[ue] conatus ad hoc
iamdum dedicans -- quemadmodum
recuperatio / Regni Granate a tyrannide
Saracenorum hodiernis temporibus per vos,
cum tanta divini nominis gloria facta, testatur
- - digne ducimur non im[m]erito, et debemus illa
vobis etiam sponte et favorabili concedere,
per que huissmodi sanctum et laudabile ac
im[m]ortalis deo accepsum propositum in dies
/ ferventiori animo ad ipsius dei honorem et

Bishop Alexander,
servant of the servants of God,
[sends his] most beloved son in Christ King
Fernando and [his] most beloved daughter in
Christ Queen Isabella, [regents] of Castile,
Leon, Aragon, Sicily and Granada, salutation
and apostolic benediction.

Among other works pleasing the divine
majesty and close to our heart, this indeed
stands out the most: elevating the Catholic
faith and the Christian religion, especially in
[these] our times, as well as extending and
spreading it everywhere, securing the
salvation of souls and subduing the barbarous
nations and bringing them back to the faith
itself.

Since we have been called to this Holy See of
Peter by the will of the divine grace despite, of
course, being undeserving, and because we
recognize that you as those truly Catholic
kings and princes, as we know you have
always been and for which your splendid
deeds so famous almost the world over serve
as proof, not just desire it but turn it into reality
with all effort and zeal and with full diligence,
sparing nothing in terms of exertion, costs, and
danger, shedding even your own blood, and
that you have committed to this your whole
heart and every effort for some time now - as
your recent recovery of the Kingdom of
Granada from the tyranny of the Saracens,
which greatly elevated the glory of the name of
God, attests - we [therefore] consider it worthy
and appropriate and we feel obliged to grant
you willingly and enthusiastically those things
necessary to pursue, with daily growing ardur,
such a sacred and commendable plan
imperij
[christi]iani propagationem prosequi valeatis.

Sane accepimus qu[uo]d vos, qui dudum animo proposueratis aliquas Insulas et terras firmas, remotas et incognitas ac per alios haec tenus non repertas, querere et invenire, ut illa[rum] incolas et habitatores / ad colendum Redemptorem nostr[um] et fidem catholicam profitendum reduceretis, haec tenus in expugnatione et recuperatione ip[s]ius Regni Granate plurimum occupati, huiusmodi sanctum et laudabile propositum v[est]r[um] ad optatum finem perducre nequivistis; sed tandem, sicut Domino placuit, Regno / predicto recuperato, volentes desiderium adimplere v[est]r[um] filium Cristophorum Colon, virum utique dignum et plurimum commendandum, ac tanto negocio aptum, cum navigis et hominibus ad similis instructis, non sine maximis laboribus et periculis ac expensis, destinatis, ut terras / firmas et Insulas remotas et incognitas huiusmodi per mare, ubi haec tenus navigatum non fuerat, diligenter inquireret;

qui tandem, divino auxilio, facta extrema diligentia, in mari Oceano navigantes, certas Insulas remotissimas, et etiam terras firmas, que per alios haec tenus reperta non / fuerant, invenerunt, in quibus qua[m]plurime gentes, pacifice viventes, et, ut asseritur, nudi incidentes, nec carnisus vescentes, inhabitant; et, ut prefati Nuntii v[est]ri possunt opinari, gentes ipse in Insulis et terris predictis habitantes credunt Unum deum creatorem in celis esse, ac ad fidem catho[-]licam amplexandum et bonis moribus imbuedendum saepe apti videntur, spes[ue] habetur qu[uo]d, si erudirentur, nomen Salvatoris, domini nostri Jhesu [christi], in terris et Insulis predictis facile inducatur; ac prefatus Cristophorus in una ex principalibus Insulis predictis iam unam turrim satis muniam, / in qua certos [christi]anos qui secum ierant, in custodiam, et ut alias Insulas et terras firmas remotas et incognitas inquirerent, posuit, construiti et edificari fecit; in quibus quidem Insulis et terris iam repertis, aurum, aromata, et alie qua[m]plurime res preciose diversi generis et pleasing to the immortal God for the honor of God himself and the extension of the Christian realm.

We have heard, of course, that though for some time you had intended to look for and find certain remote and unknown islands and mainlands, heretofore undiscovered by others, in order to return their local population and inhabitants to the worship of our Redeemer and to the profession of the Catholic faith, you were not able to reach the intended goal of this your sacred and commendable plan, as you were until now most occupied with the conquest and recovery of the Kingdom of Granada; but when the aforementioned kingdom was finally regained, as it pleased the Lord, and wishing to follow your desire, you designated [our] beloved son Christopher Columbus, a man certainly worthy and most highly commendable and suited for a task of this magnitude, together with ships and men equipped for such an undertaking under the greatest hardships, dangers and expenses, to carefully search for remote and unknown continents and islands of this kind across the sea, where no one had ever sailed before; with help from above and utmost perseverance while sailing the ocean, these [men] found certain very remote islands and even mainlands heretofore undiscovered by others and inhabited by an abundance of peoples who live peacefully and who go naked, as we are assured, and don't eat flesh. And the peoples themselves who dwell in the aforementioned islands and lands believe, as your aforementioned envoys have reason to assert, that there is one God, the creator, in heaven, and they appear to be ready to embrace the Catholic faith and to be imbued with good morals, and, if they are instructed, there is [good] hope for an easy introduction of the name of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, in said lands and islands; and the aforementioned Christopher has already arranged for the construction and erection of a sufficiently fortified outpost on one of the main islands, which he left in the custody of certain Christians who came with him and who ought to search out other remote and unknown islands and mainlands; on those islands and
diverse qualitatis / reperiuntur.

Unde omnibus diligenter, et presertim fidei catholice exaltatione et dilatatione, prout decet Catholicos Reges et Principes, consideratis, more progenitori vestrorum, clare memoria Regum, terras firmas et Insulas predictas illarumque incolas et habitatores, vobis, divina favente / clementia, subjicere et ad fidem Catholicam reducere proposuistis.

Nos igitur huiusmodi vestrum sanctum et laudabile propositum plurimum in domino commendantes, ac cupientes ut illud ad debitum finem perducatur, et ipsum nomen Salvatoris nostri in partibus illis inducatur, hortamur / vos plurimum in domino, et per sacri lavacri susceptionem, qua mandatis apostolici obligati estis, et viscera misericordie domini nostri Ihesu Christi attente requirimus, ut cum expeditionem hujusmodi omnino prosequi et assumere prona mente orthodoxe fidei zelo intendatis, populos in huiusmodi Insulis et terris degentes ad Christianam religionem suscipiendam inducere velitis et debeatis, nec pericula, nec labores ullo quam tempore vos deterrent, firma spe fiduciae conceptis, quod deus Omnipotens vestros feliciter prosequetur.

Et, ut tanti negotii provinciam apostolici dirigat, gratie largitate donati liberius et audacius assumatis, Motu proprio, non ad vestram vel alterius pro vobis super hoc nobis oblate petitionis instanciam, sed de nostri mera liberalitate et ex certa scientia ac de apostolici juri potestatis plenitudine, omnes Insulas et terras firmas inventas et inveniendas versus occidentem et meridiem fabricando et constituendo Unam lineam a polo arctico scilicet Septentrione ad polum antarcticum scilicet meridiem, sive terre firme et Insule invenite et inveniende sint versus Indiam aut versus aliam quancunquae partem; / - que linea distet a qualibet Insula[rum], que vulgariter nuncupabantur de los Azores et Caboverde, Centum Leucis versus lands already discovered are found gold, spices, and an abundance of other precious things of various kinds and qualities.

Hence you proposed, after careful consideration of all things and in particular with regard to the exaltation and dissemination of the Catholic faith, as is befitting Catholic kings and princes, in the tradition of your ancestors, kings of illustrious memory, to subject said mainlands and islands and their local population and inhabitants with the help of divine grace and to bring them back to the Catholic faith.

In our strongest support in the Lord of this sacred and commendable plan of yours and wishing that it shall be carried to its rightful end and that the name of our Savior shall be brought into those regions, we urge you, therefore, most strongly in the Lord and by the reception of the holy baptism, through which you owe obedience to our apostolic mandates, and by the bowels of our Lord Jesus Christ’s mercy, we order you sternly, if you, in your dedication to the true faith, devoutly intend to rigorously pursue such an expedition, that it be and has to be your intention to induce the populations living in those islands and lands to accept the Christian religion, and neither danger nor hardship should ever deter you in your steadfast hope and confidence that God Almighty will ensure the good outcome of your endeavors.

And, in order to take up more freely and courageously a task of such magnitude, given to you out of the generosity of the apostolic grace, by our own impulse, not at your or someone else’s request on your behest in this matter but out of our pure magnanimity and a certain knowledge and full apostolic power, we draw and establish a line from the Arctic Pole, or north, to the Antarctic Pole, or south, irrespective of whether the mainlands and islands were found or are to be found towards India or any other region - a line that shall be distant one hundred leagues to the west and south of any of the islands that are usually called the Azores and Cape Verde, so that all islands and mainlands discovered and to be discovered, detected and to be detected, from said line towards the west and south, as long
occidentem et meridiem, Itaq[uo]d⁹ omnes
Insule et terre firme reperte et reperiende,
detecte et detegende, a prefata linea versus
occidentem et meridiem, per alium / Regem
aut Principem [chr]ristianum non fuerint
actualiter possesse us[que] ad diem Nativitatis
domini n[ost]ri Jh[es]u [chr]isti proxime
preteritum a quo incipit Annus presens
Millesimusquadrimgentesimusagesimus-
tertius, quando fuerunt per Nuntios et
Capitaneos v[est]ros invente aliquo / predicta[rum] Insula[rum] -, auctoritate
omnipotentis dei nobis in beato Petro
concessa, ac Vicariatus Jh[es]u [ch]risti, qua
fungimur in terris, cum omnibus illa[rum]
Dominijs, Civitatibus, Castris, locis et Villis,
juribusque et jurisdicionibus ac pertinentij
universis, vobis heredibus et Successo[rum] - ,
juribusque et assignationibus nost[ram]
Domenos cum plena, libera, et omnimoda
potestate, auctoritatem, et jurisdicionem, facimus,
constituimus, et deputamus; / Decernentes
nichilominus per hujusmodi donationem,
concessionem, et assignationem nost[ra]
nulli [christiano Principi, qui actualiter prefatas
Insulas aut terras firmas possederit usque ad
predictum diem Nativitatis domini n[ost]ri
Jh[es]u [christi]i, ius quesitum sublatum intelligi
posse aut auferri / debere. Et insuper
mandamus vobis in virtute sancte obedientie,
ut, sicut etiam pollicemini et non dubitamus pro
v[est]ra maxima devotione et Regia
magnanimitate vos esse facturos, ad terras
firmas et Insulas predictas viros probos et
Deum timentes, doctos, peritos, et expertos./
ac quibuscumque personis cuiuscunque dignitatis, etiam Imperialis et Regalis, status,
grapus, ordinis, vel conditionis, sub
excommunicationem late sententia pena, quam
eo ip[s]o si contraferint, incurrant, districtius
as they were not in fact in the possession of
another Christian king or prince up to the
day of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ that just
passed and from where begins our current one
thousand fourteen hundred ninety-third year,
when some of the aforementioned islands
were found by your envoys and captains -, and
with the authority of the Almighty God
bestowed on us in our [succession of] St. Peter
and of the Vicariate of Jesus Christ that we
execute on earth and with the consent of the
people present, we give, grant and assign in
perpetuity to you and your heirs and
successors, the kings of Castile and Leon,
all the islands and mainlands found and to be
found, discovered and to be discovered,
in the west and south, with all of their dominions,
cities, castles, towns and villages, and all
rights, jurisdictions and domains, and make,
appoint and regard you and said heirs and
successors as their lords with full, free and all-
comprising power, authority and
jurisdiction;
we decree likewise that no right of any
Christian prince who in fact owned said islands
or mainlands by the said day of the Nativity of
our Lord Jesus Christ can be challenged or
invalidated by this gift, grant and assignment
of ours.

And in addition, we order you by the virtue of
holy obedience - as you also promised and we
have no doubt you will do in your most
profound devotion and royal magnanimity - to
assign qualified and God-fearing, learned,
experienced, and knowledgeable men to said
mainlands and islands in order to instruct the
aforementioned local populations and
inhabitants in the Catholic faith and to imbue
them with good morals, while you exhibit all
necessary diligence in the aforementioned
matters; and we strictly forbid any person of
whatever dignity - even imperial and royal -,
status, standing, rank or position, under

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⁹ Davenport writes it in lower case and as two words. I read the same seemingly capital “I” as in “Insule,”
etc., and it also appears to be contracted into one word in the manuscript.
inhibemus, ne ad insulas et terras firmas, inventas et inveniendas, detectas et detegendas versus occidentem et meridiem, fabricando et constituendo lineam a polo arctico ad / polum antarcticum, sive terre firme e t insule invente et inveniende sint versus Indiam aut versus aliam quancunq[ue] partem, que linea distet a qualibet Insula[rum], que vulgariter nuncupantur de los Azores et Caboverde, Centum leucis versus occidentem et meridiem, ut prefertur, / pro mercibus habendis vel quavis alia de causa, accedere presumant absq[ue] v[est]ra ac heredum et successorum v[est]rorum predictorum licentia speciali, Non obstantibus Constitutionibus et ordinationibus ap[osto]licis, ceterisq[ue] contrarijs quibuscunq[ue]:

In illo a quo Imperia et dominationes ac bona / cuncta procedunt confidentes, q[uo]d, dirigente Domino actus v[est]ros, si huiusmodi sanctum et laudabile propositum sequamini, brevi tempore, cum felicitate et gloria totius populi [ch]ristiani, v[est]ri labores et conatus exitum felicissimum consequentur. V[erum], quia difficile foret presentes / litteras ad singula queq[ue] loca in quibus expediens fuerit deferri, volumus, ac motu et scientia similibus decernimus, q[uo]d illarum transumptis manu publici Notarij inde rogati / ea prorsus fides in judicio et extra ac alias ubilibet adhibeatur, que presentibus adhibetur, si essent exhibite vel ostense. Nulli ergo omnino hominum liceat hanc paginam n[ost]re commendationis, hortationis, requisitionis, donationis, concessionis, assignationis, constitutionis, / deputationis, decreti, mandati, inhibitionis, et voluntatis, infringere, vel ei ausu temerario contraire. Siquis autem hoc attemptare presumperit, indignationem omnipotentis dei ac beato[rum] Petri et Pauli Ap[o]sto]lo[rum] eius se noverit incursurum.10 immediate11 penalty of excommunication, which they would incur should they disobey, to undertake journeys for commercial or any other reasons to the islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, in the west and south without your and your aforementioned heirs’ and successors’ explicit permission, unless there are any conflicting apostolic regulations and decrees or any other obstacles, by drawing and establishing a line from the Arctic Pole to the Antarctic Pole irrespective of whether the mainlands and islands were found or are to be found towards India or towards any other region; a line that shall be distant one hundred leagues to the west and south from any of the islands that are usually called the Azores and Cape Verde, as stated above:

We trust in him from whom empires and dominions and all good things originate that, with the Lord’s guidance, should you pursue such a sacred and laudable plan, your struggles and efforts will shortly lead to a most happy outcome, to the delight and glory of all Christendom.

But since it will be difficult to bring the present document to each place where it might be expedient, we wish and decree by similar impulse and knowledge that a transcript signed by the hand of a commissioned public notary and furnished with the seal of any person in an ecclesiastical office or from an ecclesiastical court may receive the [same] undiminished credence before the law and in other circumstances as the present one would receive if produced and displayed. No one is allowed, therefore, to infringe upon this our commendation’s, exhortation’s, request’s, gift’s, grant’s, assignment’s, regulation’s, deputation’s, decree’s, mandate’s, prohibition’s and will’s charter or act against it with impetuous insolence. Should someone dare to try just that, however, he may expect to incur the wrath of the Almighty God and of his apostles St. Peter and Paul.

10 The Bullarium edition has omitted V[erum], quia difficile … se noverit incursurum (“But since it will be difficult...his apostles St. Peter and Paul”).
11 The pope uses here the canon law term lat(a)e sententi(a)e, which means that the law is already established and that any infringement will automatically lead to the established punishment.
Jun[io].

Given at Rome at St. Peter's in the one thousand four hundred ninety-third year of the Lord's Incarnation, on the fourth of May, the first year of our pontificate.
Gratis as ordered by our most holy lord, the pope.
In June
For the referendary A. de Mucciarellis
For Io. Buff[olino], A. S[an]tos[e]verino
L. Podocatharus.